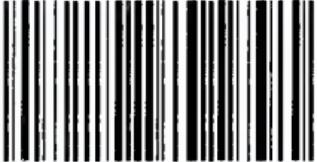


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Waldensian Costume

A Waldensian Colony In The United States

Beth. Salvans



A View of Valdese from Mineral Springs Mountain

VALDESE N. C.

**“NORTH CAROLINA’S FASTEST
GROWING TOWN”**

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REV. S. S. POET
VALDESE, N. C.

VALDESE, N. C.



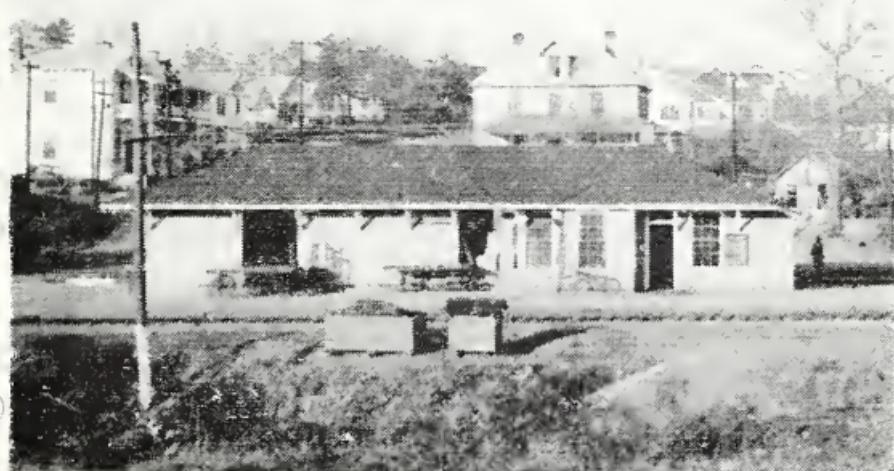
ESTLED among the hills that slope eastward from the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina, is the little, growing town of Valdese. It is less than fifty years old, yet it has an estimated population of over 3500 inhabitants.

Valdese is the Italian word for Waldensian, thus named by the early settlers.

It was in 1892 that a delegate from the Waldensian Church of Italy, Rev. Teofilo Gay, visited this country on a missionary tour and heard for the first time that there was land available in this section of North Carolina. Mr. Gay related this good news on his return to the Waldensian Valleys.

Pressed by hard economic conditions at home, the Waldenses saw an opportunity for colonization, and sent two delegates to explore the land recommended by Mr. Gay. On their return, these two explorers were divided on their opinion as to the worthiness of the land, but many villagers had already sold their farms, and were willing to try life in the new world. It couldn't be much harder than at home, on the steep, rocky sides of the Cottian Alps.

So, a group of them left their native towns, crossed the Atlantic on the Netherland ship, *Zaandam*, and arrived on May 29, 1893, at what is now



Valdese R. R. Station



Waldensian Church—Dedicated 1899

the Valdese Station on the Salisbury-Asheville line of the Southern Railway, eight miles east of Morganton, in Burke County. Eleven families, or fractions thereof, formed this first group of settlers. They were:

1. J. Henri Tron.
2. Jean Refour* with son, Jean*.
3. Jean Guigou and wife, Catherine*, with 4



The Old Stone Oven On Mr. Pons' Farm.



Valdese City Hall and Fire Department

children: Louis, Philippe*, Etienne, Alexis* and Naomi.

4. Pierre Tron and wife, Louise, with two children: Albert* and Madeleine*.

5. Albert Pons*.

6. Jean Giraud.

7. Philippe Richard* and wife, Louise*, with two children: Philippe* and Etienne*.

8. Jean Henri Pons*.

9. Francois Pons*.

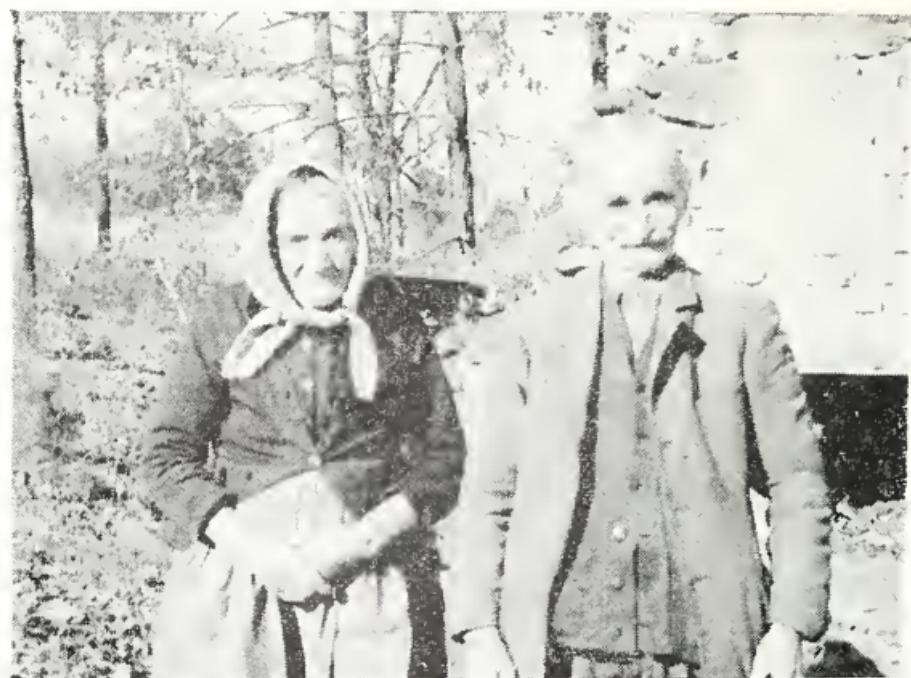
10. Francois Tron* and wife, Marguerite.

11. Jaubert Micol and wife, Jeanne, with 4 children: Jean*, Marguerite*, Emanuel* and Victor*.

They were led by Rev. Charles Albert Tron, pastor and philanthropist, well known among the Waldenses and their friends. He did not come to settle, however, only to lead them here and launch their enterprise.

There were but two or three rough, wooden shacks, hardly suitable for stranded birds, when they got off the train to found this new colony in the hills. They were young, strong, full of courage and faith, but it must have been a very trying experience indeed, to find themselves strangers in a strange land, with a language foreign to them, whose nearest neighbors were unknown people, some friendly, oth-

* Indicates those who are alive today.



Mr. and Mrs. Albert Pons

ers both curious and suspicious. The report of that memorable date says: "On the night of their arrival, on May 29, the families gathered around a table and heard the reading of Ps. 103, followed by a meditation suited to the occasion; this first service of thanksgiving and gratitude, with a solemn promise of faithfulness to the Lord, ended with a hymn and a prayer, often broken by the tears of the brethren and sisters. The foundation having thus been laid on the "Rock of Ages" . . .

Within a few days (June 8), the contract for the purchase of land from the Morganton Land Improvement Company was completed, and with a charter granted by the State of North Carolina, the Valdese Corporation was founded. It provided for a system of life in common, each sharing the burdens, the interests, the duties and the privileges. It was controlled by a Board of Directors as follows:

President: C. A. Tron, pastor.



Old Waldensian Hosiery Mill



Pilot Full Fashion Mill

Vice-President: the next titular pastor of the church.

Secretary: Philip Richard*.

Treasurer: S. T. Pearson, Cashier Piedmont Bank of Morganton.

Members: Jaubert Micol, Albert Pons*, Rev. John M. Rose, pastor of the Morganton Presbyterian Church, and W. C. Ervin*, lawyer and life-long friend of the Waldenses.

About ten thousand acres of land were purchased at a total cost of \$20,000, mortgaged by the Piedmont Bank of Morganton, N. C., with 250



The Valdese Grammar School

bonds of \$100 each, representing also purchase of farm implements and food. The tract extended southward and south-westward of what is now U. S. Highway 70 (then the Hickory road). It was a vast extension of hills and forests for eleven families! The hardy mountaineers from the Italian Alps set to work, clearing, digging, plowing, cutting timber and working a saw-mill. It was like a big family, working together to survive and to live. In July three other families came from Utah. In August six from Italy, in November fifty-two fam-

Only three are alive today (*).



The New High School

ilies joined the original group. Others followed in later years. Probably no word will ever tell the anguish and loneliness, the suffering and privations, mingled with faith, hope and determination that marked the first years of Valdese.

For a while things went on in fairly good harmony, though with great work and sacrifice, the settlers often wondering whence the next meal would come. On June 20, 1893, the first bread was baked in a stone-oven similar to the one still standing on Mr. Albert Pons' farm. It was considered an occasion for thanksgiving and an omen of success. On July 1st the locations for church, Manse, school and cemetery were chosen. The church was located where it now stands, dedicated in 1899. During the early years services were held in the house seen behind the railroad station (see picture) on the corner of Massel and Faet streets. The manse, originally located where now stands Mrs. Juliette Ghigo's home, with a farm connected to it, on the corner of Rodoret and Massel streets, was



Valdese General Hospital

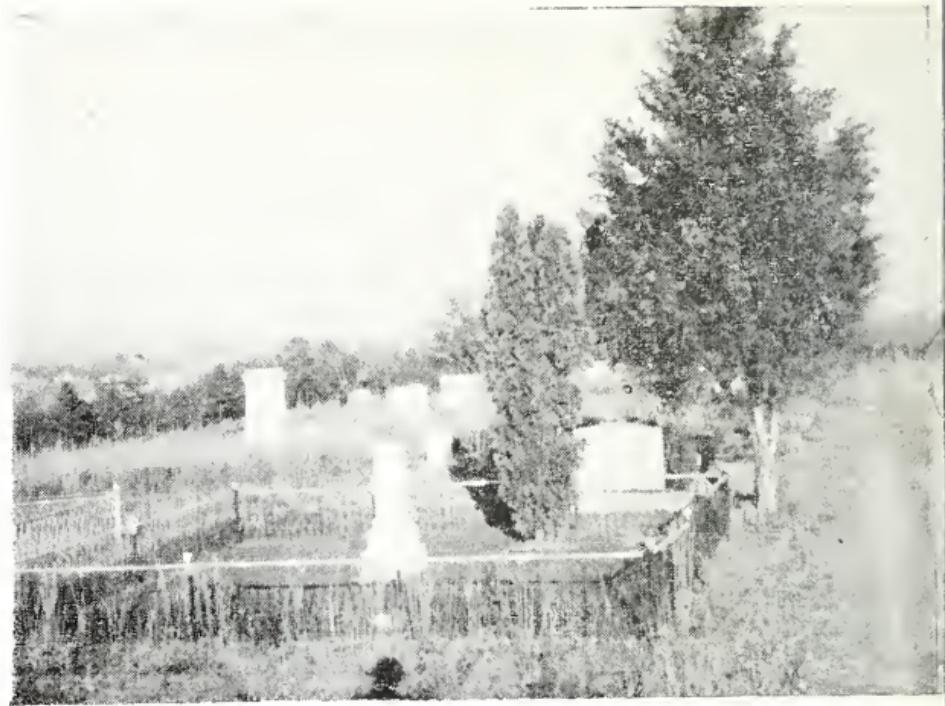
later removed to its present location on the corner of Rodoret and St. Germain streets. The school was a wooden frame house, and stood where now is the new Sunday School building of the Waldensian Church. The cemetery was originally in the pine grove behind the present Northwestern Bank building. Only one child is buried there, a son of J. Henri Tron. The cemetery was soon removed to its present location. On May 30, 1894, a certain John Meier took charge of the colony store and of the saw-mill. Just what was the integrity in this man's character in his relation to the Corporation is hard to tell—probably the less said the better. On that same date the Corporation elected a Legal Board and a Moral Board, the former with certain limitations under the latter, to handle the affairs of the colony. On July 16th of that year it was



Waldensian Bakery

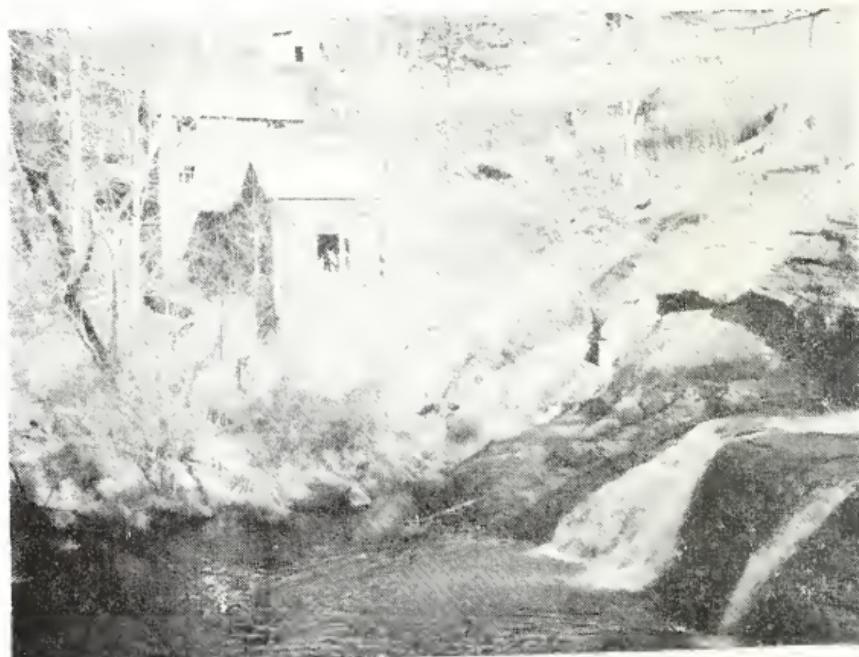
decided to hold, beside the regular services in French, one service a month in Italian.

But the difficulties were great. The land did not prove to be as fertile as thought at first; petty jealousies and administrative difficulties arose, helped by lack of knowledge of language and business; the expenses of the Corporation exceeded constantly its receipts; the people living further away (more than five miles from center of colony) wished to come closer. To save it from bankruptcy, the Corporation was dissolved at the close of 1894, and C. A. Tron, to save his brethren, paid of his own pocket a deficit of Lit. 18,000 (about \$6,000). Each family bought in and around the center of the colony what they could afford. Evidently human hearts were no better prepared then for peaceful experiments of communistic living than they were 1900 years before at the first experiment in the Christian Church!



Waldensian Cemetery

After the dissolution of the Corporation, Mr. Meier started in 1895 a hosiery factory, in a small one-room house. Mr. John Garrou worked with him. In 1896 they moved to Newton, N. C., and in 1897 to Manning, S. C. When Mr. Meier moved elsewhere again, John Garrou remained in Manning for a few years to learn the trade, and then with his brother, Francis, and Mr. A. Grill came back to Valdese. On May 8, 1901, they opened the first hosiery mill in Valdese, which, after a few years of hard labor, was housed in a larger building. It was the Waldensian Hosiery Mill (see picture). In 1910 the cotton mill (Valdese Manufacturing Company) was established, with \$30,000 from the Waldensian Mill stockholders, and \$30,000 from Morganton business men. In 1908-09 the flour mill



Flour Mill at the Falls



South of Valdese

was started by Mr. Frederick Meytre at the Falls, and still serves the community. In 1913 the Weaving Mill was organized and has fared since with varied fortune.

To this pre-war period belongs also the beginning of the Waldensian Bakery, destined to become one of Valdese's leading industries. John Peter Rostan and Philip Ghigo, after some business ventures in New York, came to Valdese and opened the first bakery at the end of August 1915, on the corner of Colombo Street and U. S. Highway 70, where is now the Pure Oil Service Station. It was a two-floor frame building, 40 feet by 50 feet.



Playing "Boccie" Behind the Clubhouse

For some time bread was baked by the light of kerosene lanterns. The first output required one barrel of flour and 14 gallons of water daily.

The post-war period has witnessed the best years for Valdese, during which it has earned renown as "the fastest growing town in North Car-



Valdese Baptist Church

olina." The town was incorporated in 1917. Trade grew, business improved, mills were established. In 1922 the Martinat Mill, in 1924 the Pauline, in 1930 the Pilot Full Fashioned, largest and best, in 1931 the Pine Burr, in 1936 the Blackstone, in 1938 the John Massey & Co. and the Francis Louise, in 1939 the Dolly. The first grocery store was opened by Mrs. Madeleine Tise around 1896-97. Other stores and houses followed: The Brinkley Lumber Co. in 1916, the Valdese Food Shop in 1923, Benlee's in 1932, B. & B. Market in 1934, Belk-Broome in 1935, City Market in 1937, just to name a few of them. With the construction of highways and hard-surfaced roads the Bakery expanded. Branches were established in neighboring towns: In 1925 in Morganton, in 1927 in Lenoir, in 1928 in Hickory. In 1929 a new building was erected, to meet the in-

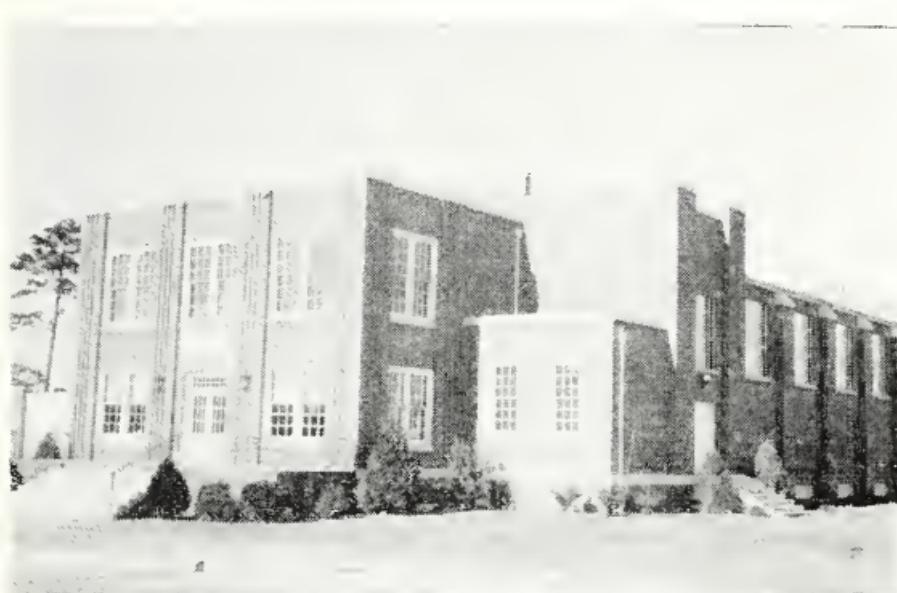


Valdese Methodist Church

creasing demands, on the eastern side of town (see picture). In 1938 the latest branch was established in Shelby.

In 1910 the Waldensian Clubhouse was built, later purchased by *Le Phare des Alpes*, a mutual assistance society. Back of this house are some "fields" for the playing of the well-known Italian game "boccie" (see picture).

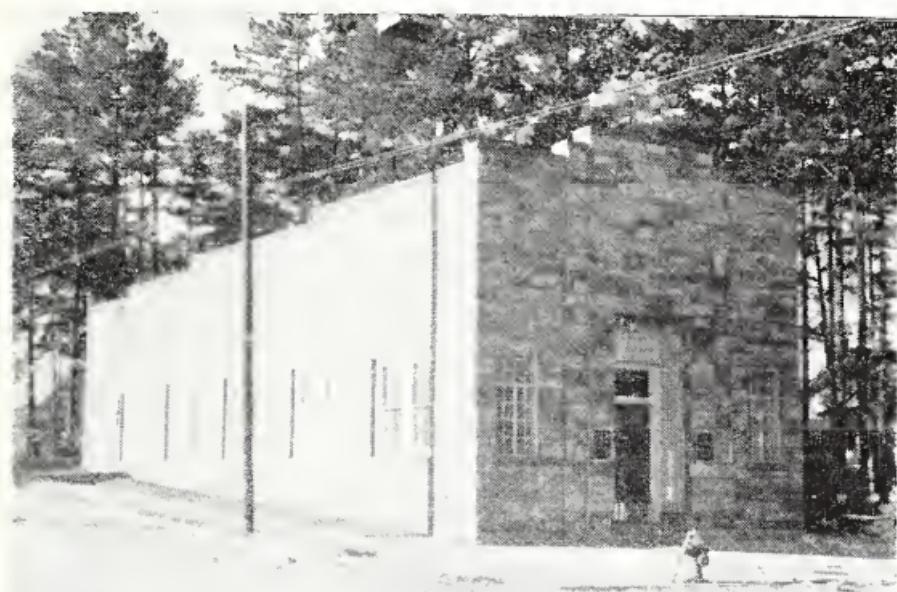
In 1923 a beautiful building was erected for the public school. Someone remarked then that it would suffice for 100 years, but in 1938 a new build-



Community Center—Francis Garrou Memorial Hall

ing had to be erected for the High School, and it is getting crowded again this year (1940).

In 1938 the mills built the Community Center, called Francis Garrou Memorial Hall, in memory of the late Francis Garrou (brother of John, founder of the first mill), a civic figure indelibly printed on the growth of Valdese, kind, generous leader and friend, Mayor of Valdese, member of the House



Northwestern Bank



*The Oldest Pioneer Couple of Valdese
(Mr. and Mrs. John Refour)*

of Representatives. The Community Center is one of the best of its kind in this section of the State.

Other churches were added with the influx of non-Waldensian people. From 1917 to 1920 union services were held by Baptists and Methodists in the chapel at the west-end of town, called Union Church. The First Baptist Church was organized in 1920, the Methodist Church in 1928.

The Valdese News, weekly paper of Valdese, founded in 1938, has a subscription list of over 2,000.

In 1939 the Northwestern Bank established a branch in Valdese. The same year the Valdese General Hospital was organized by Drs. Palmer, Lynn, Foard and Billings, using the buildings of the old Rutherford College, three miles east of Valdese.



Waldensian Church and Sunday School Building

Valdese became an up-to-date town with the building of the Colonial Theatre in 1931.

Last of the large buildings is the new Sunday School of the Waldensian Presbyterian Church, annexed to the church and called "*Pioneer Hall—in honor and memory of the first settlers of Valdese and founders of this Church—1893.*"

Civic consciousness developed with the organization of the Chamber of Commerce in 1930, the Masonic Lodge and Eastern Stars in 1932, the Lions Club in 1936, the Pilot Club in 1939.

The last step of progress taken by the city council was the surfacing of the streets in 1939.

The two oldest members of the colony are Mr. and Mrs. John Refour, both 90 years of age (see picture) still living on the farm they purchased 47 years ago, still working and attending church.

The Waldenses in their daily conversation speak *patois*, a dialect imported from the Waldensian Valleys of Italy, varying slightly from town to town, derived from the old French. They understand and speak French and Italian. Church services are now in English except for one service a month in French (2nd Sunday), at the Waldensian Presbyterian Church in Valdese.

The Waldensian Church of Valdese has joined the Presbyterian Church, U. S.

A SKETCH OF WALDENSIAN HISTORY

The Waldenses, or Vaudois, or Valdesi, are both a people and a church. They live in the Waldensian Valleys (Pelis, St. Martin, or Germanasque, and Cluson, with their ramifications) about 30 or 40 miles south-west of Turin, Italy, in that portion of the Western Alps called Cottian. Most of them are



Map of the Waldensian Valleys

on the Italian side of the Alps; very few on the French side. In the map above, notice the towns of Pral, from where most of the Waldenses in Valdese came; La Tour, headquarters of the Church; Villar, where the picture below was taken.

The early Waldenses were the blending of various groups of Christians from Northern Italy and south-eastern France who found refuge in the Alps, to escape the increasing pressure of domination by the Church of Rome (Roman Catholic Church) and her introduction of superstitious practices. Various leaders and their followers, defending truth and their freedom of conscience, were destroyed or exiled, one after another, by Rome's ruthless thirst for power. Thus we find *Jovinian*, around the year 385, opposing the theory of perpetual virginity of Mary and the celibacy of priests, fleeing successively from Rome, Milan, Verceil; *Vigilantius*, around 396, opposing the sanctification of places of pilgrimage; *Claudius, bishop of Turin* in 817, fighting the introduction of image worship, later burned at the stake for his daring; *The Cathares*, first noticed in 1028 at Monforte d'Alba in Piedmont.

Followers of those and other leaders found refuge in the Alps, as the Church of Rome was ex-

tending her dominion on Northern Italy. It was only in 1059 that the Diocese of Milan fell under the sway of Rome. It is evident that these early Protestants had to decide either to bow to Rome's dictation or flee.

The Vaudois are in all probability responsible for The Noble Lesson (La Noble Leicon), a document bearing the date 1100, written in Old French, very similar to the "patois" of Pral, as shown by these two lines:

*Ben ha mil e cent ans compli entierament
Che fu scritta loro che son al' derrier temp.*

In 1173 there appears on the scene in Lyons, France, a man that was destined to be the first leader of the Vaudois of whom there is any record. It was *Pierre Valdo*. The affinity of his name to the Vaudois has led some historians to believe that he was the founder of the movement. But the name is more likely a corruption of Wallenses, or Vallesi, meaning "inhabitants of the valleys", or from the canton of Vaud (Latin: *Pagus Valdensis*) whose inhabitants are still called Vaudoues. Reinardus Sacco, an inquisitor of the 13th century, speaks of the claim to apostolic succession attributed to the followers of Vigilantius, or Leo, whom he was persecuting, and who were none others than the Vaudois. Rorenc, another inquisitor, writing in 1630 says: ". . . the Waldenses . . . in the ninth century . . . were rather to be deemed a race of fomenters and encouragers of opinions which had preceded them".

Pierre Valdo, after his conversion in 1173, began to preach the Gospel and gathered many followers. Banished by the Roman Church, he united with the Albigenses in Southern France, and when the latter were so ruthlessly persecuted by Pope Innocent III in 1208 that 60,000 of them died, Valdo probably fled to the Alps with many of his followers and Albigenses.



Villar Pellice and the Alps

From that time on, the history of the Waldenses is a succession of years of persecution with intermittent periods of relative peace. They spread as

far as Calabria in Southern Italy, where a flourishing colony was destroyed in the 16th century. Some of the memorable dates of the Waldenses' history are: Synod of Richeneau in 1467 where Stephen, bishop of the Waldenses, ordained the first Moravian (Bohemian) ministers; their affiliation with the Reformed Movement in 1532 at the Synod of Chanforan (Angrogne); the massacre in 1655 called Piedmontese Easter (*Paques Piemontaises*) which prompted John Milton to write his sonnet beginning "*Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints...*"; the general exile in 1686 and the Glorious Return from Lake Geneva in 1689, followed by the epic defence of La Balsille in 1690. Through all those years God has miraculously preserved them.

February 17, 1848, marks a new era for the Waldenses in Italy. Freedom of conscience and worship was granted by Charles Albert I, King of Piedmont and Sardinia. Missionary work began in earnest throughout Italy with the establishing of churches: Turin 1851, Genoa in 1855, Sicily in 1861 following Garibaldi's conquest, Florence in 1863, Venice in 1866, Rome in 1870 on the heels of the Italian occupation.

In 1897 there were 22 pastors and 13,000 members in the Valleys, 44 pastors in the rest of Italy with 5,400 members. Notice the missionary spirit—22 pastors at home, 44 on the mission field.

The Italian census of 1931 gives the following figures:

Roman Catholics, 41,555,334.

Protestants ($\frac{1}{2}$ Waldenses), 82,569, or two per thousand.

Jews, 47,485.

Greek orthodox, 5,896.

Moslems, 814.

Without religion, 17,483.

Total population—41,709,581.

Crowded economic conditions at home forced the Waldenses to emigrate in the second half of the 19th century. The largest number went to South America (Uruguay and Argentina). Others in France, England, United States (New York, Valdese, Chicago, Missouri, Utah), and almost anywhere in the world.

Their beliefs are those embraced by the Reformation. Form of Government is similar to the Presbyterian.

There is a college at La Tour (Torre Pellice), orphanages, schools, homes for the aged, etc. A seminary in Rome, with a faculty of three and a student body of about 30.

The Waldenses contribute about 90% of their work in Italy. The other 10% is given by friends, mostly in Great Britain (withheld now because of war) and America, partly directly, partly through the American Waldensian Aid Society.

There are today 17 pastors in the Valleys, with corresponding parishes; 71 churches and mission stations, with 32 ministers (including some evangelists and students) in the rest of Italy; one in Zurich; one in Addis Abeba (Ethiopia); 13 benevolent institutions in Italy; seven churches and four pastors in Uruguay; three churches and two pastors in Argentina; one church with pastor in New York City.

Grateful thanks are extended to all who helped with valuable information in preparing this booklet. Especially to Messrs. A. Grill, John Garrou, and J. P. Rostan, Sr.



Copies of this pamphlet may be secured at 20c each (by mail 25c each) from Rev. Sylvan S. Poet, Valdese, N. C.



This booklet was prepared in connection with the Waldensian Celebration and the Dedication of the new Sunday School Building of the Waldensian Presbyterian Church, February 17th, 1940.

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